DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 910 RE 003 589

AUTHOR Harris, Phillip L.
TITLE Paraprofessionals--Their Role and Potential in the Classroom.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the meeting of the International Reading Association, Atlantic City, N.J., Apr. 19-23, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Conference Reports, Federal Aid, *Paraprofessional School Personnel, Program Improvement, School Aides, *Teacher Aides, Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The use of paraprofessionals has been reintroduced on a large scale into the field of professional education since the middle of 1960's. The public concern for getting their tax money's worth in quality of teaching called for federal aid to help schools hire nonprofessional teacher aides. The work of paraprofessionals in schools can be divided into clerical, housekeeping, instructional, motivational, and integrational. Teachers should have training in management techniques so that they can direct the activities of the paraprofessionals teamed with them to obtain effective results. Present paraprofessional programs are faulty in (1) training teachers' competitors rather than supportive help, (2) training only the most able aides, (3) emphasizing community involvement for its own sake, (4) overburdening classroom teachers with program responsibilities, and (5) lacking portability. The following are necessary to insure that paraprofessional programs will accomplish valid educational improvement: (1) awareness that moving into a paraprofessional program is not justifiable purely as an economic measure, (2) openmindedness and willingness to explore, (3) training of specialized educational technicians for specific jobs, (4) legislation to permit expanded use of nonprofessionals in the instructional program, and (5) a career ladder for the able paraprofessionals to become professional teachers. (AW)

ED050910

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Paraprofessionals -- their role and potential in the classroom

Phillip L. Harris
Indiana University
October 10, 1970

The teacher aide has been with us for a long time. In fact, like so many other ideas in our western civilization, the ancient Greeks had a word for it -- pedagogue ("boy leader"). The original pedagogue was the slave who led the more or less willing student to the place of learning and back home again. While his original responsibilities were fairly strictly limited to escort duty, scroll or tablet carrying, stylus sharpening, etc., he gradually came to have additional responsibilities such as drilling the student in rote exercises while he was walking him back and forth between home and school, and even eventually helping explain to the student what the teacher had talked about. Thus, even in those ancient times, there developed a sort of career ladder for paraprofessionals -- from pedagogue to tutor and, in some cases, eventually to teacher as well.

The field of religion (or magic) was probably the first to develop the role of the "professional", i.e., specialized, teacher operating from a systematized structure of content with personnel to direct it. In most other cases it was customary for the elders of the social group to teach the young purely on the pragmatic base of their longer experience rather than on any presumed training in the methodology of teaching. Whether or not the teaching was more formally structured into an artisan-apprentice relationship as became the pattern for the crafts in the middle-ages, the basic principle remained the same with the emphasis on experience rather

RE003 589

than on method. In fact, with considerable justification, one can say that the paraprofessional proceded the professional in the whole development of education. Even today, the modern counterpart of the ancient paraprofessional -- the parent, grandparent, big brother or sister -- has not entirely been replaced by the professional teacher.

For the purposes of this discussion, however, we can think of the middle 60s as a logical beginning date for the large-scale reintroduction of the teacher aide, the paraprofessional, into the field of professional education. When the ESEA was initiated in 1965, more than 180,000 paraprofessionals were hired to work principally in Title I programs. Three years later, Dr. Frank Riessman of the New Careers Development Center, NYU, estimated that more than 200,000 paraprofessionals were employed in public schools across the nation. Today in New York City alone there are more than 4,000 full-time teacher aides. And, in a recent issue of the Parent-Teacher Association magazine it was predicted that by 1977 more than a million and a half aides will be employed in the public schools.

While much of the initial impetus to the development of the teacher aide movement came from the attempt to free teachers from ever increasing amounts of administrivia, the present pressure for the increased use of educational assistants, however, unquestionably stems from a combination of factors. One of these is the nation-wide awakening of public concern for the quality of teaching in relationship to the tax cost required to support the system. In overly simplified terms, the public -- college educated, white collar or blue collar or what have you -- is calling school administrators and teachers alike to account. They are asking with increasing emphasis "Why aren't we getting our tax money's worth out of what you are doing to -- or with -- our children?" They want to know what we, as the professionals, are going to do to increase the efficiency

of our teaching in order to get more results out of the education tax dollar.

As the volume of this accountability chorus began to mount, it also became clear that the problem was genuinely nation-wide in scope and therefore it was a matter of Federal concern. Through the ESEA, funds derived from Federal rather than local taxes made it possible for even small-sized schools to equip themselves with a wide assortment of technological, educational hardware such as movie and slide projectors, tachyscopes, language labs, records and a variety of mechanical teacher aides. Unfortunately, while intended to help the teacher improve the quality of her teaching, in many cases such hardware served only to increasingly limit her teaching time. Either trained sketchily or not at all in the use and maintenance of these mechanical aids, teachers were unable to use them with their intended effectiveness, and in many schools today all these splended and complicated mechanical aids do little more than gather dust.

It was when Title I money was applied on a large scale to the hiring of supplementary, non-professional help for the classroom teacher that the real increase in the number of live teacher aids began to have a significant impact on education and the paraprofessional staged a real comeback into the field of public education.

I use the word "comeback" advisedly since the original idea, as I indicated earlier, was not really new. Nor was it limited to the ancient Greeks. In 1787 a system was developed by an Englishman, Dr. Andrew Bell, based on an earlier educational experiment he had initiated in India as a missinnary, where older, more advanced students were used to help teach younger students. An Indian educator, writing about Bell's work in India, described it as follows:

> The method of education followed in this school was a new one. Dr. Bell had for a long time watched the system pursued in the the village schools in Southern India and the system which he

prescribed for the school in his charge was a variation of this indigenous method. It consisted of the older or more advanced students teaching the younger. Each class of boys had an equal number of teachers and pupils. The teachers promoted to the next higher class became the taught, and at the next promotion became the teachers of the newcomers. By this arrangement, the master could do without assistants, an usher alone being needed. The system is no doubt excellent so far as elementary education is concerned.

James Cordiner, Bell's successor as headmaster of the school, also wrote about it in glowing terms. According to Cordiner:

> From the perpetual agency of this system, no idlers can exist. On entering the school, you can discover no individual unemployed, nobody looking vacantly around him. The whole is a picture of the most animated industry .... The system creates general activity and attention; it gives, as it were, to the master the hundred hands of Briareus, the hundred eyes of Argus and the wings of Mercury.

This certainly was an enthusiastic testimonial to the values of paraprofessional assistance in the classroom. It also points up clearly one of the most important reasons for the use of paraprofessionals -- the teacher does need more hands and eyes. I am not quite clear on the value of wings.

Another similar system to Bell's was independently established in England at about the same time by Joseph Lancaster who called his plan the "monitor system." Both systems were widely used, principally to extend education to the children of the poor at a time when little money was available for that purpose. Both systems were eventually abandoned, although some remnants still exist in the systems of education in England and south India. It may have been that one of the reasons the Monitor System failed was because it was too successful because it did manage to educate the "poor above their place" as the expression of the

times put it, and there was much resistance to it from the church and from the upper classes who were generally opposed to universal education unless it related to religious training.

There also are indications that the system was misused in order to take advantage of the economy it promised. Lancaster himself had claimed that with his system, one master could educate a thousand children. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, trained teachers were scarce and monitors were often given complete charge of classes without adequate supervision or direction. In some cases entire schools were established without a single qualified teacher. Other misuses of the system are suggested in the following quotation from an article on Lancaster in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences:

> Cheapness, simplicity and widespread public approval led to a rapid multiplication of monitorial schools, but their influence on elementary education was harmful. The system was alien to experiment and inquiry, magnified the importance of reading and reduced the teacher to the supervising of transient, ignorant and unskilled monitors. Its cheapness was a reproach to all other reformers, and its mechanical simplicity developed a routine procedure from which escape has proved long and difficult.

None of these consequences necessarily would have followed if those earlier paraprofessionals had been properly used. But the fate of the Bell and Lancaster systems may well serve as warning to us today unless we make conscious efforts to avoid the same pitfalls.

But to turn now from history to the present. Just what is happening across the country as to the use of non-professionals in our schools? Well, you name it and it's being done. We have administrative aides, classroom aides, library aides, lunchroom aides, school-community aides, volunteer aides, paid

aides, student aides, etc., etc., etc. Basically, and according to function, however, the uses of paraprofessionals may be put into five broad categories:

1. Clerical
2. Housekeeping
3. Instructional
4. Motivational
5. Integrational -- i.e., improvement of school and community realtions.

For present purposes I shall concentrate on the third broad category -- Instructional -- with particular reference to its relationship to the teaching of reading.

In the mountain of accumulating literature there is evidence that fifth and sixth graders, high school drop-outs or under-achieving high school students, adults (most generally women who would be normally classified as unemployables because of lack of skills or lack of time), miscellaneous volunteers drawn chiefly from church or service clubs -- any or all of these can make a significant contribution to the development of a student's reading skill.

It should also be clear that the so-called non-professional, paraprofessional, teacher aid, or what have you -- the name doesn't really matter -- as of right now is doing everything in the classroom from simply listening to children read to performing many of the same tasks we expect from a classroom teacher or even from a reading specialist. For example, Sydney J. Rauch from Hofstra University, Hempstead, Long Island, who also is concerned with the constructive use of the paraprofessionals in the field of reading, has listed the following as a partial list of the reading jobs that can and are being performed by the paraprofessional:

1. Listening to a student read or tell a story
2. Reading stories aloud to the individual child or to a small group
3. Preparing "Personal Language Charts" (see Learning to Read Through Experience, Second Edition, by Lee & Allen)

4. Helping a student to select a book from the class or school library
5. Helping the slow learner follow directions as he does a workbook assignment.
6. Assisting the gifted child in locating special materials for an extra assignment or independent study.
7. Preparing Ditto sheets or other materials to reinforce instruction
8. Playing word games with individuals or small groups
9. Helping children look up information
10. Correcting workbook or home assignments
11. Supervising seat work or make-up assignments
12. Supervising work areas and committee activities
13. Helping children who missed instruction because of illness or other reasons
14. Directing remedial drill work
15. Listening to and evaluating book reports
16. Filing and cataloging books
17. Operating audio-visual equipment
18. Playing games with children
19. Helping pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children to use crayons, scissors, paste or paint
20. Showing children how to distribute and collect materials.

In addition to the above, there are many clerical and classroom management tasks that can be taken care of by the paraprofessional. As one teacher commented speaking of the value of teacher aides: "By just being available when I needed that extra hand.... No matter how much we stress training in self-direction, there are always one or two children who need that extra help. That's where the paraprofessional comes in."

I'm sure that many of you, having heard this list of paraprofessional activities in the teaching of reading, are asking: "If untrained people can do all this -

1. "what incentive (or for that matter, what reason) is there left for someone to take advanced training and study if even the most severly retarded readers can be helped significantly by people with only minimal training?' or,

2. "Where does all this put the Reading Specialist or the Remedial Reading teacher?" and,

3. "If it can be shown -- as it is being shown in some cases -- that schools can get along nicely, in fact, maybe even better, without these expensive reading specialists, does this same threat apply to the need for classroom teachers and for the standards which we have worked so long to achieve as requirements for certification?"

If you as professionals are asking these questions, you can be very sure that others are asking them. And, to many, both within and without of the educational world, the rise of the paraprofessional is regarded not just as another passing innovation but as a real revolution in the whole field of teaching. It may indeed be true as many teachers claim that the paraprofessional movement is the greatest boon to teaching since the invention of the duplicator, but there are others who see in it a potential which could destroy both classroom teaching and the public school as we now know them -- and there are some who would say that this might not be such a bad idea!

I should make it very clear at this point that I am not against the use of paraprofessionals even for the actual teaching of reading. In fact, as some of you know, I am director of a program that makes extensive use of paraprofessionals -- a program that was from its beginning designed especially to be carried out by paraprofessionals of definitely minimal educational background. What I am

cautious about, even possibly against, is the wholesale manner in which some school systems may indiscriminately attempt to make use of the paraprofessional. What I am suggesting is that not just any paraprofessional -- or any given number of them, -- can be expected to solve successfully the problems of teaching reading any more than this can be expected of the most gifted and highly trained teacher. I am, however, increasingly convinced that the expertise of the trained teacher can be extended effectively by being teamed with specifically trained paraprofessionals. After we have learned more about the whole process of learning to read so that we can accurately identify the parts as well as the whole, and when we have really established diagnostic criteria to identify the specific needs of the individual child, then,at that point, by using the professional-paraprofessional team concept mentioned above, we should be able to help our students achieve that 95% degree of subject mastery Bloom of Chicago keeps challenging us with.

I realize that to speak of the classroom teacher as a diagnostician or as a manager directing the activities of one or more paraprofessionals has major implications for a drastic reorganization of school and classroom structure and of teacher education. On the surface, too, it might seem that I am arguing for something which proved to be a weakness in the old Monitor system, which I am not. The role of classroom manager has in it implicit responsibilities not only of analysis or diagnosis, but also of synthesis and coordination -- even inspiration. It also implies responsibilities for direction, guidance and goal setting. But, before this concept can become a reality we will have to start <u>now</u> to assess the full potential of the teacher aide in an instructional role based on a careful analysis of what actually is involved in learning to read. Also, before this concept can be realized, it may be necessary for our Schools of Education to make some thorough-going revisions in teacher training and certification requirements and for our school systems to be open to drastic

changes in organization of classroom procedures. Indeed, it is not too much to expect that Schools of Education may have to borrow from Schools of Business the expertise in teaching of management techniques as an addition to the more traditional curriculum for teacher training -- we might even think of a hypothetical counterpart of the MBA degree -- perhaps an MCA (Master of Classroom Administration!) Sound far-fetched? So did going to the moon ten years ago.

Seriously though, I'm sure all of us share to a degree in the feeling of being overwhelmed by this flood of potential assistance implicit in the whole teacher aide movement. Certainly one of the more important things which needs to be done is to find the time right now, before we become totally swamped, to make some sort of evaluation of the multitudinous ways the paraprofessional is being used and to think through as to which of these have the higher potential for helping us achieve our common aims.

From my own observation, based on personal contact plus extensive reading in the field, I would like to describe briefly some of the more common of these paraprofessional programs and to indicate both strengths and weaknesses.

1. There are too many aide programs which are directed toward creating junior-grade teachers. Most of these are based on the philosophical concept that teaching is exclusively an art rather than a constellation or combination of techniques which may or may not be enhanced by being directed or carried out by a "teacher-artist." Basically, I feel such programs are unfortunate. More of the same, whether of activity or philosophy, isn't the answer. Aides trained in this way inevitably become competitors with the teacher. This is sure disaster. What must be kept basic is the role of the aide as supportive or supplementary to the teacher, not as substitute or replacement for her.

2. Another group of aide programs is guilty of "creaming" in order to insure success. By "creaming" is meant selecting only the most able aides to

work in the school. If the success of a program is principally dependent on the quality of the persons carrying it out, its transportable potential is definitely limited. Frankly there just isn't a large enough available supply of highly capable aides to go around!

3. A number of aide programs have been formed with the primary intent of developing community involvement. While there are many areas in which community involvement is not only good but even necessary, and where aides can be successful as links between the school and community, to initiate an aide program with this as its principal objective not only lessens the potential use of aides in more important educational areas, but all too frequently fails because such programs emphasize involvement for the sake of involvement. In many such instances community involvement then has turned into a struggle for school control. We have only to look to New York City to see what the result is when this happens.

4. Many aide programs put such added burdens of planning, supervision and evaluation on the already overburdened classroom teacher that she is justified in wondering just what kind of aid she is receiving. Here the teacher aide or aides can become more of a hindrance to good teaching than a help.

5. Some paraprofessional programs are primarily touted as a means to make teachers happier by providing them with more time to teach. Such programs see the paraprofessional chiefly in the role of housekeeper or chief clerk. I'm not trying to minimize the importance of such assistance (If I did, I'm sure you would storm the stage!) But this type of program is more teacher relief than teaching aide. I'm not against happy teachers, but this kind of "relief", of and by itself, is no real guarantee for making "good" as well as "happy" teachers.

One final comment about many paraprofessional programs, particularly those which fall into the instructional category, is their lack of portability. While they may work well indeed in the original school where they were initiated and

when supervised or operated by the persons who designed them, the lack of specific training rules for the paraprofessionals who must carry them out makes it very difficult to transmit the program to another school system. On first thought, the problem of putting down on paper the specific details of a training program for paraprofessionals may not seem overly difficult. But any of you who have tried it will be able to confirm my own experiences -- it is not easy, particularly when even a fairly well written set of instructions actually depends for its success on constant oral additions from an omnipresent supervisor of some sort. All too many descriptions of aide training programs tell what the aides are trained to do, but not how they are trained to do it.

In this very brief overlook of kinds of paraprofessional programs that are being developed and implemented across the nation I have attempted chiefly to describe what is happening. Let's look now at the "why". What justification really does exist for the reintroduction and use of non-professionals in our schools?

In my judgment, the only basis on which we can justify an aid --mechanical or personal -- is if it can be shown that it really does make a difference in pupil learning. This may seem like a ridiculously simple statement of the obvious. But so is our basic assumption that schools exist for the primary purpose of making it possible for students to learn. However, one has only to read some of the research which reports activities of paraprofessionals to see that the conclusions consistently are based more on appearance -- on subjective evaluations or impressions -- than on hard data coming out of actual pupil achievement. This kind of subjective evaluation has been the hallmark of educational research -- and even of educational policy making -- far too long. It is indeed an exceptional report that bases the reasons for its continuance on demonstrable pupil gains in learning. And I am appalled at the number of professional people who attempt to evaluate a project with the statement: "Teachers,

parents, aides and other personnel involved in supervising the program seem to be favorably impressed!" I would agree that it is important that any program have the support of all involved, but this support needs to be grounded on defensible data. School boards in particular are now beginning to ask for such hard data in order to justify the allocation of monies in any kind of educational venture. There just is too little money and too many places to spend it.

Unfortunately it is also true that regardless of hard data, if the professional staff is not in complete agreement with what is trying to be accomplished even a good program can fail. I have seen several excellent programs submarined for lack of commitment on the part of the professional staff. In spite of what I said earlier about using teacher happiness as a basis for evaluation, we can be jolly well sure that if teachers are not happy about a program it will never be successful. On the other hand, once teachers see that a program can indeed be of assistance to them, little convincing has to be done.

I have been very restrictive in terms of justifying an aide program unless we can show that the return will be high. Certainly one of our most important aims should be to reduce failure. Any means which we can use to do this effectively will certainly help us to get our money's worth. As taxpayers as well as teachers, I am sure no one objects to this. But what can be done to insure that the use of a paraprofessional program really will accomplish valid education improvement?

One of the first things needed is an awareness on the part of school boards and the general public that moving into a para-professional program is not justifiable purely as an economy measure. It may pay off in the long run, and this is where we should be looking, but, as has been mentioned earlier, when economy is the sole motivation, we can count on sure disaster. Teacher aides are not presently, and probably never should be, considered as replacements for trained teachers. Within well defined limits they may be able to do one or more specific parts of the teaching role better than the unassisted though trained

professional, but beyond those limits their own lack of training of necessity keeps them in a supplementary role.

Also we need an awareness on the part of the professional educator that the surface has just been scratched in terms of paraprofessional involvement. We need to make sure that rules, laws, restrictions or organizational structures don't put obstacles in the way that will prevent further exploration and development. We must continue looking for the "better way" and unless we proceed with an open mind and a willingness to explore, the educational assistance movement will stagnate. The more we learn about how children learn and the conditions necessary for learning to take place, the better we will be able to delegate parts -- but never the whole -- of the teaching task to those with lesser qualifications. This may not be possible if we are forced to make instant decisions today because of pressure groups in national organizations, whether related to education or not, which make immediate demands without regard for what the long range effect might be.

There is a tremendous potential for self-destruction of the whole aide program if caution and reason are not exercised by all parties involved. Hasty, and particularly, selfish decisions could mean sure doom. I question seriously the need for another organization that is pushing for professional status, even though I feel equally sure that a wide door leading to a professional teaching career should be left open to those paraprofessionals who "catch fire" in the process of their work as aides. But, every time demands are satisfied at one end of the continuum, the wave is felt everywhere along the line. We could end up with teachers and aides in out-and-out financial competition with each other. And if we allow aides to think of their work as being the same as that of the teachers rather than as a supplement to it, we need not be surprised if they come to demand an equalization of pay. I feel the basis for support of public education could well collapse under this strain and all the possible

gains from a paraprofessional program could be nullified in the process.

We can prevent some of these potential disasters if we develop the technology before we create the positions to be filled. In this way we can prevent encroachment and uncertainty in roles and responsibility. And, if teachers, too, have a part in this exploration, we can be assured of a smoother road to hoe. It is conceivable, and I feel highly desireable, to have specialized educational technicians, each trained for a specific job, and this training, within carefully prescribed limits, may well include <u>how to teach</u> as well as <u>what to teach</u>.

A fourth need is legislation to permit expanded use of non-professionals in the instructional program. Very few states have made attempts in this direction, and not a few will have to revise legislation now in existence even to allow paraprofessionals to be used at all. I hope it won't be long before all 50 states will have made legal what is already being done almost everywhere.

There also, and this is not unrelated to several of the previous needs discussed, is a need to provide a career ladder so that the aide program for <u>some</u> can become an actual entry into the field of teaching. This will demand a re-examination of certification requirements for teaching. It will also require walking a thin line between job stratification on the basis of salary and a workable policy of job description and limitation. No matter how many paraprofessionals decided to go from being an aide to being a professional teacher, the basic role of the aide must be kept clear and must be maintained. An aide, even the best one, is a tool, not a decision maker. She may well be a most valuable extra pair of hands, but she is not a head!

Now, in closing I'd like to do a bit of crystal gazing into the future.

I hope to see the day when we can say all children are achieving learning mastery because of our increased knowledge of both the teaching process and of the learner. I think we can well use the non-professional as a research tool in providing some of this information.

I hope within ten years we will see school programs being developed using the concept of the classroom manager with four to six educational technicians assisting him or her. The classroom manager will devote her time to diagnosing pupil needs, to supervision of the assistants who are assigned to work with individual students in meeting the needs shown by the diagnoses, in evaluating the degree of actual pupil achievement made, and most importantly, in establishing the goals and directions for the classroom as a whole.

I also hope to see the new careers concept expanded so that working as a teaching aide can be a first step in the direction of becoming a professional teacher. By this I mean a program where a school district or system develops occupational tracks beginning with those who lack formal education and training and which provides opportunity for their step-by-step advancement. As more schools do this, I hope more Schools of Education will take notice and begin to change the way in which teachers are trained.

We must, more than anything else, come to grips with the major problem of finding some way to establish effective contact with each child. I think the paraprofessional movement can lead us in this direction. I hope to see the day when no student drops out of school because there was no one who cared enough. And, I believe that a carefully designed program which combines the skills of the professional with the assistance of the paraprofessional can help make this a reality.